



Acton Historic District Commission

472 Main Street
Acton, MA. 01720

Board of Selectmen
Acton Town Hall
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720

September 11, 2007

Re: 17 Woodbury Lane

Dear Selectmen,

You invited the Historic District Commission to comment on rehabilitation and reuse of 17 Woodbury Lane, a Town-owned wood frame residential structure located in the Acton Center Historic District that dates from the late 18th century. Members of the HDC attended a walk-through of the structure organized by the BOS earlier this year, and we were provided with the Reuse Feasibility Study commissioned by the Town in 1998. We feel very strongly as a united Commission that this historic structure in its present location is a valuable resource in the Acton Center Historic District, and that it has the potential to be a substantial working Town asset if restored and put to proper use. The structure has been abandoned and neglected over the past decade and has fallen into disrepair. We believe urgent action is required to preserve the structure and avoid even more costly future repairs. We support a Community Preservation Act application for this purpose, as detailed below.

The 1998 Reuse Feasibility prepared by Turk Tracey and Larry Architects, LLC has a wealth of information about the property. We agree with their recommendation that the structure be restored and preserved because of its value as a contributing resource to the Historic District. We vigorously support their finding that "the exterior of the house retains much of its original eighteenth century character and acts as a buffer to the expansion of the parking lot behind it helping to maintain the character of the district." We note particularly that the house and mature growth substantially hide the view of the existing parking lot from Woodbury Lane, which in itself is valuable to the character of the Acton Center Historic District.

The Feasibility Study offers a number of recommendations for repairs and considers a number of options for the use of the structure. The options range from stabilizing and "mothballing" the property to full renovation and reuse of the structure as Town office and/or meeting space. We agree fully with the recommendations in the report that the exterior envelope be repaired and restored, which now should be expanded to include roof replacement and repair of internal damage caused by roof leaks in recent years.

We believe the 20th Century additions might be more economically demolished than rehabilitated (which would improve the historic appearance and integrity of the house). We note there are economical ways to repair structural components, replace floor joists, and make other necessary repairs in the historic parts of the house.

Of the use options offered in the 1998 report, the HDC supports option 4, which renovates the structure into town offices and meeting space, but we offer a few important observations that should substantially reduce costs (which can only have escalated over the past decade). Much of the estimated renovation cost for option 4 is the expense of installing enclosed fire rated egress stairs, a full size passenger elevator and accessible toilets on both floors. The first floor of the existing residence is very close to the same elevation as the Town parking lot behind and can be made accessible at minimal expense. If public uses of the building are limited to the ground floor only, the significant expense of the fire rated stair, elevator and second floor bathrooms could be avoided. New accessible toilets would be needed at the ground level only. The second floor in this scenario could be used for storage or back office operations not requiring public access and would require neither significant upgrades nor extensive rehabilitation. According to the State Building Code CMR780, a business use of less than 3000sf only requires a single means of egress and no elevator is required if the public has no need to access this level. Deficient portions of the floor structure at the first floor should be addressed and the basement moisture issue addressed via a combination of ventilation and measures to prohibit water infiltration.

The first floor of the existing structure offers a number of spaces that would be suitable for offices and meeting rooms. There are a number of small town departments that may be good candidates for relocation to 17 Woodbury Lane, which would relieve the obvious crowding at Town Hall. These departments would benefit from their close proximity to Town Hall and access to public parking. We all know that storage and meeting space is also at a premium, which this structure could accommodate. If departments are not willing or able to relocate, their "deeper" storage and meeting needs could be met by this structure. The entire second floor of the building could serve as storage, and first floor space could be used for meeting and/or office space. Town boards should not be overlooked for use, as well.

| The Historic District Commission fully supports any effort that would restore, preserve and reuse the historic elements of the existing structure at 17 Woodbury Lane. Further, we would endorse an application for funding for such an effort through the CPC or other means. We believe that the Town has the obligation as the steward for this historic structure to take action to reverse years of neglect or to allow the property to be acquired by another entity if the will and resources are not available. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss this structure with the BOS at your September 24th meeting at 7:15 p.m., and in assisting the effort to restore it in any way possible. We plan to attend the Community Preservation Committee's September 13th meeting to discuss this project under the heading of the Town's priorities and give a preview of a CPC application, with which we will be happy to assist. We note a CPA project at this property would easily meet the criteria for CPA funding, including the leveraging of other funding.

Thank you for considering our input.

Sincerely,



Thomas Peterman

For The Acton Historic District Commission

Cc: John Murray, Dean Charter, Roland Bartl, Community Preservation Committee, Historical Commission, Design Review Board, Historic District Commission